In conversation with Christos Yannaras: a Critical View of the Council of Crete

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Much has been said and written in the last few months about the Council in Crete, both praise and criticism. We heard much about issues of authority and conciliarity that plagued the council even before it started. We heard much about the history of councils, about precedents, practices and methodologies rooted in the tradition of the Orthodox Church. We also heard much about the struggle for unity, both in terms what every council hopes to achieve, as well as in following the Gospel commandment for unity. Finally, there are several ongoing discussions about the canonical validity of the council. Most of these discussions revolve around matters of authority. I have to say that while such approaches may be useful in a certain way, inasmuch they reveal the way pastoral and theological needs were considered in a conciliar context in the past, if they become the main object of the reflection after the council, they are not helping us evaluate it properly. The main question, I believe, is not whether this council was conducted in a way that satisfies the minimum of the formal requirements that would allow us to consider it valid, but whether we can move beyond, well beyond this administrative approach, and consider the council within the wider context of the spiritual, pastoral and practical problems of the Orthodox Church today.[1]

Many of my observations were based on Bishop Maxim Vasiljevic's *Diary of the Council*,[2] which says something not only about the official side of the council, but also about the feeling behind the scenes, even if there is a sustained effort to express this feeling in a subtle way.

Many of the ideas that I start with here however, are based on ideas of Christos Yannaras, which have been published in Kathimerini around that time,[3] and through an exchange of ideas with him during 2016-2017. It is for this reason why this essay is titled 'In conversation with Christos Yannaras'. Nevertheless, this should not be taken as a presentation of his own views (by which I mean that he should not be blamed for any ideas expressed here in a stronger way than he himself

[1] Some approaches however, such as the short book written by John Chryssavgis, *Toward the Holy and Great Council: Retrieving a Culture of Conciliarity and Communion* (Department of Inter-Orthodox, Ecumenical & Interfaith Relations, 2016), make a good effort to explore some of the issues that the council started considering, yet they were quickly dropped from the agenda.
[2] Bishop Maxim (Vasiljevic) of Western America, *Diary of the Council* (Los Angeles: Sebastian Press, 2017)
[3] Cf. Christos Yannaras, "«Μεγάλη Σύνοδος»: ἡ Ἀντίφαση Ἐγγενής", accessed 4 April 2017, http://www.kathimerini.gr/864266/opinion/epikairothta/politikh/megalh-synodos-h-antifash-eggenhs and "Ρεαλισμός Μαρτυρίας –Ὄχι Ἰδεολογήματα", accessed 4 April 2017 http://www.kathimerini.gr/865107/opinion/epikairothta/politikh/pealismos-martyrias--oxi-ideologhmata

would present them, or for any opinions of mine with which he may disagree), but rather as a reflection on the significance and the role of the council, which is using some of his concerns as an entry point.

Browsing through Bishop Maxim's *Diary of the Council*, we can certainly discern a lot of good will among the participants of the council, something that may be seen among other things, in the practical difficulties that had to do with the preparation of the council and with the participation and the coordination of the several Orthodox Churches that eventually took part. We can also see this good will in that the Council tried to encourage unanimity of decisions with a light rather than with a heavy hand, and in this way it tried not to give the impression of a centralized event organized by a strong vertical hierarchy – something that was a sensitive point regarding the relationship between Constantinople and other Churches. My concern here however, is not whether there was enough good will and wish for cordial relationships among the bishops who participated, but whether the framework of the Council was problematic enough to urge serious ecclesiological questions, and also with questions about what constitutes a dialogue and a Council, what are the urgent problems of the Orthodox community, and what may be (or not be) the way forward.

Before we talk about the council itself, we have to take a step back and look at a number of pastoral, ecclesiological, administrative, and theological problems in the Orthodox world. Let us begin with an idea that was fundamental for the Council, even in the discussions that prepared it: the idea of unity. According to the historical guidelines that were discussed in the context of the council and are mentioned by Bishop Maxim in the *Diary of the Council*,[4] despite the historically understandable absence of Rome and the unfortunate self-exclusion of Antioch, the Council may not have had the authority of an Ecumenical Council, but it came close to it. Nevertheless, reality is different. The first idea for a Panorthodox Synod may be found in two encyclicals of Ecumenical Patriarch Joachim III in 1902 and 1904, while there were many preparatory meetings in Constantinople, the Holy Mountain and Chambesy since 1923.[5] The need for a Panorthodox Council has been acknowledged for over a century, and the anticipation for the meeting of Orthodox bishops has lasted as long. The Panorthodox community therefore, in one way or another, has repeatedly expressed the need for a wide council that would address many of its practical and theological difficulties.

[4] Bishop Maxim mentions the canonical criteria set by the 7th Ecumenical Council, for a council to be recognized as ecumenical: participation (even by representation) of the Patriarchates of Rome and Constantinople, and agreement (also even by representation) of the Patriarchates of Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem. Bishop Maxim, *Diary of the Council*, 26.

[5] Cf. Ἰωάννης Σιδηρᾶς, *Τὸ Ὅραμα τῆς Ἁγίας καὶ Μεγάλης Πανορθοδόξου Συνόδου ὡς Πρωτεύθυνος Διακονία Πανορθοδόξου Ἑνότητος ὑπό τοῦ Πρωτοθρόνου Οἰκουμενικοῦ Πατριαρχεῖου ἀπό Ἰωακείμ τοῦ Γ΄ ἕως Βαρθολομαῖου τοῦ Α΄*, accessed 4 April 2017, https://www.scribd.com/doc/314615368/%CE%A0%CE%B1%CE%BD%CE%BF%CF%81%CE%B8%CF%8C%CE%B4%CE%BF%CE%BE%CE%B7-%CE%A3%CF%8D%CE%BD%CE%BF%CE%B4%CE%BF%CF%82-2016

In terms of the question of the participation, the most notable absence from the Council was the absence of Russia and two of the Churches that are closest to it. The absence of Russia has significant ripples everywhere, especially in the diaspora, where the unity of the Orthodox world is more visibly tested. There has been a tension here between Constantinople and Moscow for quite some time, because of the lack of clarity (or rather consensus) of ecclesiastical jurisdiction in the diaspora as well as in other places (something we may see in the troubled history of the OCA, its emancipation from Moscow and the subsequent question of Constantinople as to who can grant autocephaly, but also in the difficult divisions of the Ukrainian Church), the question of the ethnic identity of several Western Orthodox Churches that consist of largely non-ethnic members notwithstanding. Incidentally, the Orthodox Church in North America, and the OCA in particular, is an interesting case study in itself: while the laity are largely united by the (now mostly) common language of worship, and therefore it is not unusual to see Greeks worshipping in OCA churches and vice versa, the OCA itself is still caught in the struggle of power between Moscow and Constantinople. Although it emerged as a serious attempt to emancipate itself from Moscow and help create an autocephalous, indigenous American Church (regardless of how successful it was in this direction), caught between its Russian past and its not yet fully recognized autonomy, the church of Schmemann and Meyendorff was not represented in the Council.

How serious is the tension between Moscow and Constantinople? There is a level of political antagonism, or struggle for authority, understandable in the simple observation that while Constantinople demonstrates and guarantees the continuity with the historical past and the age of the Fathers, Moscow is much more powerful and rich at the moment. And yet, there is another level beyond the dynamics of the last few decades. The most pessimist reading of this situation is the one that Christos Yannaras has expressed several times: that in the last five centuries the Russian Church has gradually created a distinct and autonomous religious culture, something that Yannaras observes in its distinct style of music, the specifically Russian vestments for priests and bishops, the modification of ancient symbols and images. In the list of such specifically "Russian" symbols we could also add the Russian Cross, which has its footstool directed in the opposite way than it was in antiquity, something that has given it a very different meaning, predated by the attempt of Ivan the Terrible to create a national cross that echoed his victory over the Tatars and Islam in Kazan in 1552,[6] and even the particular directions of Russian architecture. Ultimately, along with different liturgical and pastoral practices such as confession just before communion, kneeling during the Liturgy, the insertion of the prayer of the Third Hour in the epiclesis and the insertion of the

[6] Cf. Didier Chaudet, 'When the Bear Confronts the Crescent: Russia and the Jihadist Issue', *China and Eurasia Forum Quarterly,* Central Asia-Caucasus Institute & Silk Road Studies Program, 7/2, (2009): 37–58.

precommunion prayers (normally read individually at home) just before communion, such differences may constitute a distinct and separate ecclesiastical ethos. Some of the changes that originated in Russia, such as the emergence of the high iconostasis that divides completely the nave and the altar, have spread, perhaps unfortunately, to the rest of the Orthodox world, while others have not. While many such particular characteristics simply reflect the local culture and ultimately the openness of Orthodoxy (the Orthodox Church in the past not only did not oppose the translation of Scripture and the liturgical texts to different languages, but encouraged the creation of writing in the case of the Slavic-speaking people so that the Gospels and the services could be written down, as opposed to the practice of the medieval Roman Catholic Church, which systematically imposed its own style of worship in lands under its jurisdiction), they become problematic when they stress an otherness, and especially when they produce a distinct theological strand, which stands in opposition to the attitudes, the sensitivities and the views of the rest of the Church. The onion dome, for instance, came about as a combination of the traditional use of the dome as a symbol of heaven (something that may be traced to pre-Christian civilizations)[7] and the Gothic spire – something quite natural for the time, the place and the influences that Russia accepted. When Evgeny Trubetskoi, on the other hand, tried to explain it as a result of a different theology (the flame of prayer), he did so carving a special place for the Russian Orthodox identity, equally distinct from the West and the Orthodox world.[8] Likewise, there are modern Russian iconographers, accustomed to flat surfaces and to a strict symbolism of colours, who do not recognize the 6th century Pantokrator of Sinai as an image that complies to the definition of what is an icon. In other words, while the multiple local experiences are a wide base for the ecumenical experience of the Church, they become problematic if they start producing separate theologies.

Perhaps this view sounds too extreme or unfair within a context of ecclesiastical cultures that have seriously attempted to move beyond the historical stumbling blocks of the past, and to move forward. What we see in the North American experience for instance, where Greeks, Russians, Serbians, Romanians, Arabs, Albanians, as well as Orthodox from non-traditionally Orthodox backgrounds have worshipped together for generations, such symbolic language has been generally embraced by all, and any critical approach to their significance and use can only be done from the inside, pertaining to symbols that may have a distinct origin, but nevertheless belong to all ethnicities. Therefore, when Alexander Schmemann says that he is not fond of Byzantinisms,[9] he does so at a level beyond the old oppositions of the historical past, as a way to look into the liturgical experience beyond the weight of history - and it is precisely in this way that Orthodoxy can absorb

[7] Cf. the seminal article by Karl Lehman, 'The Dome of Heaven' *The Art Bulletin,* (27/1, 1945, 1-27.
[8] Eugene Trubetskoi, *Icons: Theology in Colour* (SVS Press, 1973), 17
[9] Cf. Alexander Schmemann, *The Journals of Father Alexander Schmemann, 1973-1983* (SVS Press, 2000).

particular cultures, but not to be tied to any one of them – Greek, Russian or anything else. Nevertheless, while this promising syncretic view can be seen in multi-ethnic societies at the level of the laity (but not usually at the level of the higher clergy), the European experience has not caught up with it yet.

Yannaras observes, quite poignantly, that this alienation of religious culture preceded, in very similar steps, the historical separation between East and West, and warns against the danger of a future schism between the Russian Church, along with any Orthodox Churches that may follow it, and the rest of the Orthodox world. Indeed, by the time Sylvester Syropoulos describes the theological and political difficulties between the East and the West in the context of the Ferrara-Florence Council in the 15th century, he also records the great divide in the culture between the two parties, to the extent that he did not recognize the worship space as consistent with his own experience.[10] In contrast, although the Greek and the Coptic Church have been formally separated five centuries more than the Latin West and the Greek East, both sides hold a mutual recognition of the sacred space in each other.

Here we could also remember the idea of Moscow as the Third Rome, a concept that emerged in the 16th century during the time of Ivan the Terrible.[11] This idea has been put forth since then, even in the 20th century by people who were influential in the diaspora, such as Nicholas Zernov,[12] furthered the divide between Russia and the rest of the Orthodox world and encouraged the mistrust between the two sides for a long time. Perhaps a remainder from that time is the current reluctance of Moscow to recognize the title of the Ecumenical Patriarch. What is disconcerting about the idea of the Third Rome, is that as in the case with the alienation between the East and the West, the creation of a different religious and cultural identity may eventually lead to an antagonism of primacy, power struggles, and eventually the exploration of opposing worldviews or theologies.

This is the elephant in the room of Orthodox ecclesiology, and although the prestige of the Council of Crete suffered from the absence of the Russian Church, the Council was not able to solve, or even to address the problem. While at a first reading the absence of the four Patriarchates (especially of Antioch) seems to be cause by a circumstantial disagreement, it brings forth important ecclesiological questions, which may not be solved by an attempt to find the middle way between

[10] V. Laurent, ed., *Sylvestre Syropoulos: Les Mémoires du grand ecclésiarque de l'Église de Constantinople Sylvestre Syropoulos sur le Concile de Florence (1438-1439)* (Lutetiae: Éditions du Centre national de la recherche scientifique (CNRS), 1971).
[11] Cf. Alar Laats, 'The Concept of the Third Rome and its Political Implications' in Alar Kilp, Andres Saumets (eds.), *Religion and Politics in Multicultural Europe: Perspectives and Challenges* (Tartu University Press, 2009), 98-113.
[12] Nicholas Zernov, *Moscow, the Third Rome* (MacMillan, 1937).

two different centres of power. We need to look for a deeper spiritual principle here, rather than to appeal to the politics of compromise. In this case we have two basic questions. The first question, as Yannaras has posed it, has to do with the meaning of a Patriarchate today, and whether its meaning, especially after the emergence of the newer Patriarchates in the Balkans, has drifted to signify the official state religion, and ultimately to legitimize the *de facto* ethnophyletist structure of the modern Orthodox Church. Second, whether the independence of the Patriarchates, and the autonomous and autocephalous Orthodox Churches, is such, that in effect we operate on the principle of the branch theory within the Orthodox communion, and in this way our ecclesiology in practice has drifted to a mutual recognition of independent churches, most of which are defined by national characteristics, rather than criteria of faith and tradition. Bishop Maxim, in his *Diary*, expresses repeatedly the view, or perhaps the hope, that this is not the case, but after the Council of Crete, which relied so heavily on national representations, it is becoming increasingly difficult to see the difference.

All of the important sees in early Christianity, Patriachates and Metropoleis, emerged as such because they had apostolic foundation, administrative significance, and were pioneering theological thought – although we see that perhaps the strongest criterion quickly became the administrative one, and the structure of the Church mirrors the structure of the state cities or prefectures. In the beginning this did not reflect the need for a system of global (ecumenical) coordination or governing, something that happened after the fourth century. The addition of Constantinople introduced the Constantinian model of the relationship between the Church and the state, and the addition of Jerusalem, a city which was not important in terms of administration, was made mostly for symbolic reasons. Already at the time we can start questioning what the meaning of a Patriarchate is, because of the proximity of Antioch and Jerusalem, but nevertheless the system of the ancient pentarchy was understood and functioned as an actualization of community at the global level. Pentarchy certainly never implied the balance of five separate parties, and certainly there was nothing that looked like national representations, as the ecclesial unity expressed in each Patriarchate was inspired by the inclusive vision of Pentecost, where the first Christian community was made by "Parthians, Medes and Elamites, residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene, visitors from Rome (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs" (Acts 2:9-11).

In the last few centuries this principle was eroded, first by the emergence of national churches in lands that were becoming Christian, and wished to assert their ecclesiastical authority and independence from Constantinople, and second, through the establishment of national churches in lands that had formerly belonged to the spiritual and ecclesiastical oversight of Constantinople,

following the establishment of national states. The first such national church was the Church of Greece, which although never proceeded to the establishment of another yet Patriarchate, as the Churches of Serbia, Bulgaria and Romania, was reformed under the guidance of the Bavarian Regency of King Otto in the 19th century. Other churches followed quickly, sometimes using financial pressure against Constantinople, or confiscating its dependencies. In this new order, it is interesting to note that although the normative criterion of pre-eminence in the ecumenical conciliar hierarchy – whatever this may mean – traditionally had been the antiquity of each Church, we see that this principle had not always been observed, but had been taken into account along with political power. The Patriarchate of Moscow, for instance, although established five centuries after the Patriarchate of Georgia, occupies a higher place of honour than it in the hierarchy of Orthodox Churches.

The independence of the Church of Greece from the Patriarchate of Constantinople in 1833 and subsequently, one by one, of all of the other Balkan nations, either as autonomous or autocephalous Churches or as Patriarchates, was defined according to national criteria. Despite the repeated condemnation of ethnophyletism in theory, the practice of the Orthodox Church since the 19th century has resulted in a communion of fourteen or fifteen (depending on whether the OCA is one of them) national self-governing Churches, each of them administratively independent of the other. The Patriarchate of Constantinople, as Yannaras reminds us, as it is based in a land and a surrounding culture that is not Orthodox or even Christian, is certainly as far as possible from the idea of a national state church, but I am afraid while it maintains a historical *raison d'être* as to what a Patriarchate is because of its particular historical circumstances, it is the exception rather than the rule, compared with the majority of the Orthodox national Churches. With the exception of Constantinople, the ecclesiological structure of the Orthodox Church is similar to the landscape we encounter in the Protestant world, which consists of several different state churches that may be defined by different national or spiritual trajectories, and yet they largely recognize each other, denying any kind of central coordination. While the pre-eminence of Constantinople is generally recognized in the Orthodox world, its role is certainly nowhere close to the strong vertical authority of Rome. Moreover, this pre-eminence is not understood in the same way in the Orthodox world, as for some churches its position is mostly a memory of the glorious past, without any executive or spiritual powers, and as the case of Crete showed, there is no way to enforce any meaningful unity coordinated by it. One of the differences however, is that while much of the Protestant world in the past had been shaped under a climate of war (political and religious), clash and differentiation, this is usually not the case anymore: today in the Protestant world we see a large mutual recognition and intercommunion at the level of laity and clergy, among churches that had been separated by

national as well as spiritual differences in the past.[13] In this way, the national factor has now become more important in the Orthodox world, where the diaspora has still not yet been able to develop an ecclesiastical structure defined by local/geographical criteria rather than by national criteria, despite a significant spread of Orthodoxy beyond ethnic groups, and also despite the gradual assimilation of these ethnic groups into the wider culture. Unfortunately, Orthodoxy in the New World is still divided and defined by ethnic lines. The effort to create an American Church beyond and above ethnic lines started in a very interesting way with the weaning of the OCA from Moscow, but in the end neither did the OCA move much beyond its Russian roots, nor was this move followed by any similar moves in the other ethnic jurisdictions in North America.

To return to the question of the coordination of the entire Orthodox world, since many things have changed since the fourth century, and since the geopolitical map has changed significantly since the time of the foundation of the ancient Patriarchates, I think it is no longer practical or possible to keep considering the question of the entirety of the representation of the Orthodox or Christian world, as we see repeatedly in Bishop Maxim's diary, measured by the historical participation of the two more senior Patriarchates (Rome and Constantinople), or the five (or four) ancient ones. This narrow historical approach effectively limits the definition of Orthodoxy as the religion that looks to the glory of Byzantium as its 'classical period', and makes sense primarily within the historical, cultural, technological, and spiritual context of the time between the 4th and the 15th century. On the other hand, a wider understanding of Orthodoxy, not tied to a specific memory of a former glory, would remind us that Christianity, rather than an organized religious structure, is the celebration of the presence of Jesus Christ among us and the continuous communion of the Church with him, as it is reflected in the Gospel, and as it is attested and experienced by the Fathers and the saints of every age and of every place, equally in the past, in the present and in the distant future.

The highest-level authority of the Orthodox Church in the present is a committee of fourteen (mostly national) representations. However, there is no clear mechanism that can protect or enforce this unity. While it is generally recognized that the role of the Ecumenical Patriarchate is to convene or preside over Ecumenical Councils – something that has not always been the case, incidentally – it has no power to enforce participation or agreement. The absence of an Emperor, the person who often demanded and enforced conciliar unity, sometimes using not very Christian methods, shows a gap in Orthodox ecclesiology – the system cannot work very effectively without an Empreror. Here we need to remember that although from the point of view of the citizens of the Roman Empire it made little difference if the head of the state was an Emperor or a King, in the wider context of the

[13] An example is the sharing of communion between the Anglicans, the Lutherans, the Methodists, the URC, the Old Catholics, and other churches.

Christian world it did make a difference for a long time, at least in symbolism and protocol: for many centuries, the heads of Western European kingdoms sought the recognition and confirmation of their title by the Emperor of the Eastern Roman state when they ascended to power. Even if this was a mere formality, it shows that the role of the Emperor was properly understood beyond and above ethnic lines.

Lacking this kind of unifying agent, there was no way to coopt the participation of Russia, Bulgaria, Georgia, and Antioch in the Council of Crete. But beyond questions of authority, representation, and ethnophyletism, there is an important question about how we understand unity and distinctiveness: can we understand the unity of the Orthodox Churches at the level of the minimum common ground, or should we understand it as the sum of their experience, considered as a shared experience? Simply put, the first approach would consider normative only what is happening everywhere, whereas the second would consider normative anything that a local Orthodox Church, with its own circumstances, would consider normative. While the first approach seems particularly suited for the exploration of faith and doctrinal thought (and this is why it resonates in the interesting, yet problematic, formula of Vincent of Lerins "everywhere, always, and by all"[14]), the second is suitable for the practical and pastoral challenges that need to be considered within their time and place. The Council of Crete did not make this distinction, and took the conservative approach in pastoral matters. Instead of the richness of the ecumenical Orthodox experience, which would urge us to look at the local experience through the lens of the timelessness and the boundlessness of the eternal Church, in the case of mixed marriages, for instance, the decision was to fall back to the safety of the letter of the law, and to understand the eternal through local criteria instead of the other way round: what was perhaps true for the majority of the Christian world several centuries ago, and still holds true in the mountains of Georgia, has to remain the norm in the rest of the Orthodox world.

From this point of view, perhaps one of the most problematic themes that were discussed in Crete was the question of the pastoral and practical difficulties of marriage in the present age, especially in the context of the modern, multicultural world. Marriage was discussed extensively, both in Crete and in the pre-conciliar discussions, and as we have already mentioned, despite the pastoral difficulty of mixed marriages, the Council had the chance to explore its meaning in the context of Orthodox spirituality, and shed some light to its practical difficulties. There is a serious problem with the way the question was approached: beyond a token presence of a few non-voting female and lay consulting theologians, at the highest level this discussion involved no women, and no men who had

[14] *Commonitory* ch. 2, 6; NPNF Series 2 Vol. 11: 132.

had the experience of marriage themselves. It seems to me that the bishops and monks who attempted to explore the spiritual, the theological and the pastoral aspects of marriage, should have kept a humble silence on a matter on which, perhaps with the rare exception of bishops who were widowed before they ascended to the episcopacy, they had no experience. Instead, the proper procedure would be to refer the matter to committees of married priests and lay men and women. The Orthodox Church, at least in theory, recognizes that both the way of the parish and the way of the monastery lead equally to salvation (although it is hard to remember even more than a handful of saints who were not monastics),[15] and that the monk is no closer to salvation than the layman. As Maximos the Confessor reminds us, commenting on the Transfiguration, the presence of Elijah and Moses signifies, among other things, the equality of the celibate and the married life, since Elijah was celibate, and Moses was married (indeed more than once).[16] Therefore, as it would be inappropriate for a parochial committee to draw the regulations of a monastery, it is inappropriate for a community of monks to draw the regulations of the married life. The practice of the Church however, does not usually follow suit, as it is usual for people who live in the world, married or not, to seek the advice of monks. Married priests often confess to monks, but the reverse does not happen very often. Finally, perhaps the majority of books and articles on marriage in the Orthodox tradition, are written by the people who have no relevant experience.[17]

But perhaps in order to push this to an extreme, in order to illustrate the depth of the difficulty, we can talk about the case of the second marriage of priests, a topic that was dropped from the agenda before the beginning of the Council, although it touches on the lives of thousands of priests. I am afraid that this intended omission shows a serious vacuum of theological methodology and thought. The Council in this case acted as a timid administrative structure, closing the door to a huge pastoral problem, by choosing to simply ignore the spiritual and pastoral dimensions of the issue. Acting in a pietistic manner, without exploring the theological, anthropological and pastoral dimensions of the issue, the council did not find any compelling evidence against the marriage of widowed priests, but decided that since it was not going to be accepted by all Orthodox Churches (for cultural rather than

[15] A study towards this direction is David and Mary Ford's *Marriage as a Path to Holiness: Lives of Married Saints* (St Tikhon's Seminary Press, 1995).

[16] Maximos the Confessor: *Ambigua* 10, 31, PG 91, 1161-1169B.

[17] Perhaps it is necessary to mention here that I am not trying to criticize monasticism as a movement or as a constituent part of the Church. My criticism, on this and on other similar points perhaps reflects an impatience with the kind of monasticism that betrays its own calling: monks who have spent only a short time in a monastery, and then become spiritual guides, archimandrites or bishops, being scandalized by the world, and also scandalizing it, instead of living in "their repentance", the monastery of their tonsure, to use the monastic expression that Papadiamantis uses in his story entitled *The Monk*, which explores precisely these problems, which have not changed in the last century. Monasticism is exemplary as an act of love, repentance and asceticism, beyond rationality, but I believe it is problematic when it asserts itself as the normative, or highest form of Christianity, and when it tries to impose the particularity of its struggle (such as against sexuality) on the rest of the Church.

theological reasons, although we have to note that the Church has a strong hand in creating local culture, as much as it is shaped by it), it could not proceed with this line of exploration. In addition, without giving a convincing reason, it did not even consider the much bigger and more theologically challenging issue of divorced priests. Yet, it is this case – extreme perhaps – that tests the limits of our understanding both about the priesthood and about the nature of marriage. We could mention here three reasons qualifying this, as an attempt to explore the practical and the spiritual depth of this issue:

First, because in widowhood the bonds of love may not be shattered, and therefore the spiritual and psychological union between the husband and the wife, although not physical, may continue even after the death of one of the two. The separated couple does not have this privilege: here it is recognized that not only the bond of love is not present anymore, but also that the marriage may be detrimental to the psychological and even the spiritual life of the spouses. Therefore, while a widowed priest with children may face a heavier practical load (in terms of raising the children as a single parent), the divorced priest may face a heavier psychological and spiritual load.

Second, the Orthodox Church recognizes marriage as an ascetic challenge. The theological implication of this is twofold: first, that while there may not be such a thing as a perfect and care-free marriage, marriage is not founded on pleasure, but on a continuous attempt to be drawn beyond the limits of the ego and to urge us to become more than we are. Therefore, a successful marriage is not necessarily one that makes life easier for the spouses, but one that leads to their psychological and spiritual maturity – and conversely, we need to recognize that a marriage where the spouses become increasingly antagonistic, defensive, duplicitous, is harmful to them and to the family, and it may be necessary to dissolve it in order to prevent its harmful effects from being perpetuated, and to make sure that the children are not affected. The second point is that as with any ascetic ascent, if a marriage fails irrevocably, in the Orthodox Church the people are allowed a second and a third attempt, rather than giving up after the one and only attempt. Yet, this premise of trying again is not extended to priests. The de facto fallback status of a widowed or divorced priest is monkhood, although the calling and the roles of the priest and the monk are quite different and should not be confused.

Third, even if we consider a failed marriage as a moral stain, it is a personal stain, rather than one that would necessarily impede the ability of the priest to act as the father of a community – to extend this metaphor, life shows us that a divorced biological father or mother may be still a good parent to a child; and also that a father or a mother do not usually lose their status as parents and the parental relationship with their children. The analogy here is that the defrocking of a priest who

remarries after the death of his wife, is analogous to the social services taking away the children from their parents if they divorce. In addition, to insist on a legalistic reading of 1 Timothy 3:2, which mentions that the priest should be the husband of one wife, is simply bad exegesis – not only for the legalist attitude, but also because 1 Timothy simply finds concubinage and polygamy incompatible with the most basic understanding of love as understood in the Christian tradition, which does not distinguish between spiritual and corporeal attraction, but is based on the imagery of the Song of Songs, and the complete union of the spouses. 1 Timothy, and the New Testament in general, shows a new direction, speaking of the union of the husband and the wife as a union of two equals, two beloveds given to each other completely, rather than as a social contract. This was revolutionary at the time, and even after many centuries of Christian formative education, issues surrounding the union of the beloveds that are based on social economy, such as property, social status, lineage, taxation benefits, and so forth, often take precedence over the meaning of the marital union. To draw from all this a legalistic instruction goes against the spirit of the commandment itself. In contrast to Donatism, for the Christian Church after the fifth century it is clear that the moral status of a priest does not affect his priestly role, and the Biblical spirit of such prohibitions (usually Pauline rather than from the Gospels) has to do with the general concern of St Paul to avoid schisms caused by scandals. The experience of the Anglican Church, where priests are allowed to remarry (something that did not meet with much contention), has shown us that society at large is ready for it. Moreover, if we think of scandals and pastoral sensitivity, the Church, or perhaps more correctly, a certain part of the hierarchy in our day, scandalizes more people by expressing extreme conservative positions, usually articulated in a fundamentalist, legalistic language. Its involvement in political life is greatly reduced to an extreme conservativism leaning towards the extreme right political wing, or often preaching a sermon of intolerance and hatred, as we see in the case of the bishops of Peiraias and Kalavryta. If scandal is to be considered within the Pauline context of 1 Cor 8:13, where the apostle explains that while he naturally has the right to eat meat, he would rather never do it if this caused a difficulty to his fellow Christians (and therefore avoiding scandal is not a matter of observing laws and regulations, but an act of love), we certainly need to discern whether people today are scandalized by a priest who remarries, or by a bishop who directs his flock to spit on homosexuals on sight.[18]

Overall, although it is often said that Orthodoxy also means Orthopraxy, and that there is no distance between doctrine and practice, in the Orthodox Church there is a serious lack of what has elsewhere been developed as practical theology. The systematic examination of practical and

[18] Cf. Metropolitan Amvrosios of Kalavryta and Aigialeia, "Αποβράσματα της κοινωνίας σήκωσαν κεφάλι", accessed on 18 May, 2017, http://mkka.blogspot.gr/2015/12/blog-post_9.html.

pastoral issues, and the recognition of several problems that flow from them, which may be illuminated by theological thought, implies a bottom-to-top approach, which has not been developed satisfactorily. For this reason there is often a significant gap between akriveia and oikonomia. However, when the exception is more frequent than the rule, it may be a good sign for us to reconsider our theological thought about such matters in depth.

These views, which admittedly only scratch the surface of the issue, which unfortunately affects a good part of the clergy in our days, serve only as an example of how such a case may be explored in a spiritual and pastoral way. Likewise, issues that may be explored in a similar light include the ordination of women and the anthropology or symbolism behind it, a more sustained discussion on fasting, bioethical questions, and liturgical literacy. Some of these areas have been explored to some extent, whereas others not sufficiently so. The anthropology of gender and sexuality has certainly not been explored satisfactorily, at least not much beyond the level of canon law. While Yannaras in his *Freedom of Morality*[19] has expressed some interesting concerns about the archetypal symbolism behind the maleness of the priest, it is not certain that this symbolism has the same meaning today as it did two thousand years ago. As Carl Jung has repeatedly shown, while archetypes generally express a pattern beyond time and space, it is nevertheless possible for them to evolve and give their place to new archetypes over time. While social changes within the last few decades may have influenced the way we think, unless we extend our gender research to the dynamics of sexuality, it won't be possible to consider the weight of the symbolism of gender. Interestingly, this also shows that the discussion on the gender of the priest needs to be connected not simply with the examination of anthropology in general, but more specifically with a deeper examination of love and sexuality. It is unfortunate that many spiritual guides cannot distinguish between lust and love, and the fallback position of safety is to judge a relationship based on its legal status, i.e. whether sexuality is expressed within the confines of a legitimate marriage or not. An example that is often used to demonstrate this absurdity is that, technically speaking, sex five minutes before the wedding ceremony is a sin, while five minutes afterwards is legitimate. Obviously an absurd approach either way, because marriage is the self-offering of love that includes the two spouses and also God. While there has always been a legal dimension to marriage, long before the Christian wedding ceremony was established, I think it is more appropriate to look at the sacrament of marriage in a way similar to the canonization of saints, where the Church recognizes the sanctity that is already there, rather than confer it to a person as one would do a promotion, and thus "make" a saint. In the case of the sacrament of marriage, I think it is equally sensible to avoid the legalistic question, and think of the recognition of the commitment and the wish for an ascetic self-offering that has taken place even

[19] Christos Yannaras, *Freedom of Morality* (SVS Press, 1984).

before the blessing itself – not that this would make the blessing itself irrelevant, as this too would be part of the commitment, and the wish of the couple to present themselves as a new family in front of God and the people. But be this as it may, these are questions that need to be explored much further than they have before.

There is much more that needs to be said here. Asceticism has been explored, almost exclusively, within the context of a willing self-limitation, an abstinence from material pleasures. Yet, this useful training of the self, which we owe to the monastic tradition, is only half of the way. The other half is the offering of the self to an Other, personally, willingly, and without an expectation of a reward. Without this actualization of love, and without a relationship with an Other, one's relationship with God may become ideological, abstract, and ultimately self-serving. The most essential Biblical images of the relationship of the Church with God take precisely this kind of love as a model. The image of Christ as the Bridegroom of the Church, and the imagery of the *Song of Songs*, which was used as a catechetical text both in Judaism and in the early Church,[20] show that this kind of asceticism of love was understood very clearly in early Christianity, before it was obscured by the asceticism of self-castration, found figuratively and literally in Origenism. It is certainly interesting that Yannaras has explored the *Song of Songs* as a source of theological inspiration, in one of his most fascinating books.[21] But here we need to point to a serious gap in Orthodox theology. In the 18th century Nikodemos the Hagiorite and Makarios of Corinth compiled the Philokalia of monastic asceticism, a collection of texts that is by no means a systematically solid Patristic collection (it does not include any writings of Basil the Great, for instance), and has no place for the ecclesial communion, but reflects the despair of the people who saw the collapse of the Church structure around them, and tried at least to find salvation individually, through the way of personal ascetic ascent. Influence of this text has been such, that several theologians, ignoring these problems, have argued that after the age of the Fathers we live now in the age of Philokalia. While the Philokalia of monasticism has helped us preserve the tradition of the individual ascetic ascent, it has preserved only half of the meaning of asceticism. The other half would consist of texts that follow the tradition of the *Song of Songs*, or the imagery of the Christ Bridegroom and his love for the Church, the image of God as the passionate lover as we find it in the thirtieth step of the Ladder of John Klimakos[22] and in the writings of other saints, or of the lives and experiences of saints such as Boniface of Tarsos and

[20] Cf. Andreas Andreopoulos, 'The Song of Songs: an Asceticism of Love', *The Forerunner* (No 57, Summer 2011, Orthodox Fellowship of St John the Baptist): 17-26.
[21] Christos Yannaras, *Variations on the Song of Songs* (Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2005).
[22] "Μακάριος ὃστις τοιοῦτον πρός Θεόν ἐκτήσατο ἔρωτα, οἷον μανικός ἐραστής πρός τήν ἑαυτοῦ ἐρωμένην κέκτηται". In the translation of Liubheid and Russel, "Lucky is the man who loves and longs for God as a smitten lover does for his beloved", John Climacus, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent* (The Classics of Western Spirituality, Paulist Press, 1982), 287.

Aglaia of Rome, who found salvation through their love for another human being rather than in the desert, fighting against acts of selfishness rather than against bodiless temptations. Furthermore, it would include texts that illustrate the experience of the sacrament, the significance of the *communitas* with the living and with the dead, the Church as a hospital and workshop of love instead of a court of ideas and behaviour. The *Philokalia of Love*, has not yet been written, and perhaps we need it much more than the compilation of Makarios and Nikodemos.

I admit that my views on many of these matters sound quite bleak. I am afraid that we are witnessing the potential beginning of two different schisms within the Orthodox Church. The one, as already mentioned, concerns any independent Church that creates its own, distinct religious culture, and gradually separates itself from the dialogue that the rest of the churches engage in, something that can happen because of the lack of a clear ecclesiological model of global communion. As Yannaras reminds us, it is sufficient to look at the trajectory the Franks followed in their alienation from the Roman Empire, first culturally and subsequently theologically, which prepared the schism between East and West, and draw our conclusions about how much this pattern is repeated in our days. To compare the situation with what happens in other Christian denominations, the Papist model may be successful in terms of its administrative effectiveness, but the centripetal force of this model is too high a price to pay. The imperial model, where unity was forced upon the Church by the political power, is also a memory from a different time, which cannot work in our days. The Protestant model of the parallel churches seems to be closest to what we are facing, or rather to what we are practicing today. Still, while that model is not concerned about an overall unity of the constituent churches, for better or worse, it is much more inclusive in practice, more permissive in variance and in pastoral sensitivity than the Orthodox communion.

Next to this 'vertical' schism, we can observe a 'horizontal' schism. There is a great number of people who are disappointed by the Church, and who although may be nominally Orthodox, in reality they feel they have been marginalized by their own Church, and in the end they are not active members. An even greater number of people may not even consider themselves faithful, but simply accept their Orthodoxy as part of their cultural identity, as there is nothing else (yet) that could replace it at the spiritual level – because the disappointment of our time with the failure of the hierarchies has led to a quite robust post-Marxist materialism, in the East and in the West.

These people, who have been left out, is the silent majority of the laity in Orthodox countries, and I am afraid that the percentage is growing. While Orthodox ecclesiology in theory is based on the community of the faithful, where all the people have a place and they contribute in distinct yet equally important roles, what we see in practice is a solipsistic clericalism. The Church generally

keeps a distance from the wider cultural, academic, scientific, and political life, and its recurrent role in the last few decades is to express and cultivate fear of almost everything new. While the entanglement of church and politics has generally been disastrous wherever it has been attempted, the quasi-monastic, withdrawn image of the church vis-a-vis the other aspects of communal life, has rendered it irrelevant for larger society. With a very small number of notable exceptions, by and large, Orthodox higher and middle clergy is absent from cultural, academic and scientific life. We may simply remember the animosity of the clergy towards Nikos Kazantzakis, both during his lifetime, when he was almost excommunicated by the Church of Greece in 1954 (an attempt that was stopped in its rails only because of the decisive action of Patriarch Athenagoras), and even much afterwards, when Metropolitan Augustine of Florina organized rallies in 1988 against the screening of Martin Scorcese's *The Last Temptation*, based on Kazantzakis' book.[23] In both those cases, the laity and the political leadership stood firmly by the side of Kazantzakis. Here is precisely the problem: that the organized Church has, more readily, identified itself with people such as Augustine of Florina, rather than with the author of *Spiritual Exercises*, and has identified with the side of fear and ideological fanaticism instead of the side of hope.

There is a visible and growing alienation between the clergy and the laity. Symptoms of this alienation, from both sides, include the contempt of many clergymen, especially monastics, for anything 'secular', and likewise, a rising social anticlericalism, among people from various socio-economic strata, who nevertheless consider themselves Christian, and also a growing percentage of people in traditionally Orthodox countries, who do not consider themselves Christian. As an indication for this alienation we can look at the statistics that describe church attendance: In Greece the percentage of people who claim that they attend church regularly is 27%,[24] compared to a 51% in Ireland,[25] 47% in the USA,[26] and 20% in the UK.[27] In Russia, the percentage is 8%[28] - and we also know that most of even these percentages in Orthodox countries reflect the participation of the

[23] Cf. "Ο «Τελευταίος πειρασμός» που έφερε τον Καζαντζάκη ένα βήμα πριν τον αφορισμό", accessed on 20 May 2017, https://fouit.gr/2017/04/15/%CE%BF-%CF%84%CE%B5%CE%BB%CE%B5%CF%85%CF%84%CE%B1%CE%AF%CE%BF%CF%82-%CF%80%CE%B5%CE%B9%CF%81%CE%B1%CF%83%CE%BC%CF%8C%CF%82-%CF%80%CE%BF%CF%85-%CE%AD%CF%86%CE%B5%CF%81%CE%B5-%CF%84%CE%BF/.
[24] Pew Research Center, "Global Attitudes Project Spring 2013 Topline", accessed on 20 May 2017, http://www.pewglobal.org/category/datasets/2013/?download=31111.
[25] "Know your faith", accessed on 20 May 2017, http://knowyourfaith.blogspot.co.uk/2009/11/mass-appeal-church-attendance-in_20.html.
[26] Pew Research Center, "US Public Becoming Less Religious", accessed on 20 May 2017, http://assets.pewresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/11/2015/11/201.11.03_RLS_II_full_report.pdf.
[27] Pew Research Center, "Global Attitudes Project Spring 2013 Topline", accessed on 20 May 2017, http://www.pewglobal.org/category/datasets/2013/?download=31111.
[28] Pew Research Center, "Global Attitudes Project Spring 2013 Topline", accessed on 20 May 2017, http://www.pewglobal.org/category/datasets/2013/?download=31111.

elderly, while the younger generations are even more dramatically absent from the life of the Church, or hostile to it. In this case, the historical pattern and precedent that should concern us is that of the Reformation, which, among other factors, was caused by a sharp contrast between the clergy (or Rome) and the laity (or the local authorities), despite an overall zeal for Christianity on both sides. In contrast to ancient Christianity, and with very few exceptions (such as in Cyprus), in most Orthodox countries there is no participation of the laity in the election of bishops. In addition, although the tradition of married bishops is ancient, and accepted even among the apostles, the Church decided to ordain to the episcopate only monks, at a time when monasticism was becoming a spiritual model of all Christians, a practice that also needs to be questioned in our days.[29] Therefore, the entire administration of the Church has been transformed to a closed, self-selected club, consisting only of monastics. Nevertheless, to return to the Council, in the context of what we know and what we have experienced in the last few centuries, a larger church gathering, such as an important council, cannot be limited to a gathering of a limited number of bishops who act as representatives of their constituencies, even if these bishops are accompanied and assisted by lay theologians. Mutatis mutandis, we can see that Vatican II, which played a significant role in the regeneration of Roman Catholicism in the middle of the 20th century, faced some of the same problems that Orthodoxy is facing now: the antagonism with liberation movements (in our case also with ultra-nationalist or pagan revivalist movements), the need to assert the position of the laity within the Church, the need to foster dialogue with the modern world, and the need for internal evangelization. Since in the Orthodox world we face more, deeper, and more urgent challenges than these, we need and should expect a Council with at least comparable impact as that of Vatican II for the Catholic Church.

Is there a way forward here? I am obviously disappointed with the way our hierarchy understands the structure and the voice of the Church. The ancient Church Councils were not meant to be instruments of potestas and magisterium, but a framework that would allow a pluralist rather than an exclusivist dialogue, which would address every view and practice that could divide the Church, and it would try to consider these problems in the context of theological reflection, thus finding and showing the way forward to all involved parties. Simply put, heresy was nothing else than the *choice* (which is what the word αἵρεσις means) to leave the conversation, and to establish a separate community. At the dawn of Christianity, the examination of such issues started from a local level, but for matters of consequence to the entire Church, this meant an as complete representation as possible, with ideally the participation of all bishops from the entire Christian world, for an extended

[29] Cf. Sotiris Mitralexis, 'A Return to Tradition? The Marriage of Bishops in the (Greek) Orthodox Church', *International Journal of Orthodox Theology* 7:4 (2016): 205-218.

amount of time – sometimes years. The bishops, all of them equal to each other, contributed the testimony of their direct liturgical and communal experience, rather than represent national or local interests in carefully considered and agreed groups. Basil the Great, as we can remember, divided several of the dioceses under his care, ending up in some cases with extremely small dioceses, in order to take more bishops with him in the Second Ecumenical Council – we can perhaps say that he tried to play the system, but the point is that the system was disposed to accept all the voices it could possibly accommodate.

Many centuries after the last Ecumenical Council, in anticipation of what could be one notch less than an Ecumenical Council for the Orthodox Church, we can look into what motivated early Christianity and at the same time what are the practical and pastoral hopes and challenges of our time. Although the Orthodox Church is sadly disfigured by centuries of ethnophyletist practice, and this is a reality we cannot ignore, I believe it will be wrong to give in to an Orthodox version of the branch theory, as the Council of Crete effectively did, by allowing itself to be defined by participating national Churches, each of which brought a carefully considered number of delegates.

The branch theory is inconsistent with Orthodox sacramental theology, for which it is essential that we recognize the entire sacramental presence of Jesus in a gathering of two or three people in his name, following Matthew 18:20. In order to appreciate this however, we need to look at its implication at some theological depth, rather than as a matter of administrative coordination. Incidentally, a question for another time, that has not been adequately examined is that if we accept this catholicity (if by catholicity we imply that the gathering of the faithful in one place around one chalice manifests the entire, the complete Church) at the level of the Eucharistic gathering, we either need to consider the entirety of the sacramental presence of Jesus Christ at the level of the parish rather than at the level of the diocese (which is consistent with ancient Christianity), or to recognize that something is missing from the Eucharistic gathering. Our ecclesiology has not yet defined clearly the difference between the parish and the diocese, or the celebrant-priest from the celebrant-bishop, the primary role of both of whom is to preside over the Eucharistic gathering.[30] Nevertheless, the fragmentation of Orthodoxy to national state churches, sanctioned by the Council in Crete, can only be explained on the basis of a version of the branch theory within the limits of the Orthodox cultural tradition. Sadly, although Orthodox ecclesiology has given us several theological gems in the 20th century, there is a great difference between Orthodox ecclesiological theology and practice.

[30] This is essentially the observation of Demetrios Bathrellos on the episcopocentric ecclesiology of John Zizioulas: Demetrios Bathrellos, 'Church, Eucharist, Bishop: The Early Church in the Ecclesiology of John Zizioulas', in Douglas Knight (ed.), *The Theology of John Zizioulas: Personhood and the Church* (Routledge, 2007), 133-146.

All these problems, however, mean that we need to consider a much more open, much more public, and much more extended dialogue than ever before, which will transcend ethnic lines, it will make obsolete the concept of the ethnic state Church, and it will revitalise the sense of the entire Eucharistic community. The formula of a Council consisting of national representations of bishops, in the context of a local synodal and hierarchical system that has not operated very well for centuries, is an attempt to use a modified 4th century structure in order to address 21st century problems. I am afraid that this won't be sufficient.

Despite the decades-long hype and the non-conclusions of the Council in Crete, there are many real theological as well as practical questions that need to be addressed, the first two of which have been posed by Yannaras:

1. What is the meaning of a Patriarchate today (and therefore how can we address the discrepancy between Orthodox ecclesiology and ethnophyletist practice)?

2. Can salvation be considered an individual achievement or a communal struggle (which touches on pietism and a judicial approach of Christianity)?

3. We could also add a question about the Orthodox understanding of belonging to the Church: Too often the approach we encounter nowadays reflects the reduction of Christianity into an ideology, of a religious correctness that is more precisely defined as Orthodoxism rather than Orthodoxy. An area where this may be seen in the last few decades, is the question of millenarism and the end of the world, especially as expressed through literal interpretations of the Apocalypse encouraged by bishops and elders, and usually reduces salvation to 'belonging to the correct party or ideology', against any serious interpretation of the Book of Revelation. Although this may be a question of lesser theological value, there is a great need for clarity among the faithful, since the numerous ideological, 'Orthodoxist' approaches in circulation, in print or on the internet, articulate fanaticism using Biblical and theological terms.

4. As discussed above, it is necessary to start an examination of anthropology, with particular emphasis on sexuality, and on gender differences and similarities, which would go well beyond citing Biblical passages out of context. The discussion on marriage and its impediments, which took place in Crete, is nowhere near the depth of the exploration that is needed.

5. It is necessary to conduct a discussion about liturgical practices, which would include corrections of the text (such as the quite important προσφέροντες which has become προσφέρομεν, something

that changes dramatically the meaning of one of the most important prayers of the liturgy),[31] parts that have been interjected into the text relatively recently (such as the individual prayers before communion), a discussion on and enforcement of the 20th canon of Nicea I about kneeling, which is still prevalent in many Orthodox countries, and other liturgical matters. Of course the list can go on and on. It is important that we look at things like that very seriously though, because the Liturgy is, practically and theologically, a product as well as a source of our theological understanding, and of our attitudes concerning communion and salvation. For many people it is the only, or at least the main source of theological thought. Therefore, liturgical matters, in the Orthodox Church more than anywhere else, should not be allowed to collapse because of indifference or limited understanding.

I believe that it is necessary to have an extended and prolonged discussion and exploration of such matters, that could last two or three years rather than two weeks, with the full participation of bishops, priests, lay theologians and professors, and scientists. This is the kind of theology at the public square that would allow us to air the pastoral and theological issues that threaten to repeat history either with a vertical schism between Greeks and Russians (as it was between Greeks and Franks in the past), or with a horizontal schism between clericalism and laity (as it was in the Western Reformation). The Council of Crete at least succeeded in reminding us that we need to carry on with such discussions, and one of its concluding remarks was indeed that it will be good to continue further after this first step. I believe that this needs to be done at a much larger scale than ever before. Otherwise, I am afraid that History will look on this Council as one of the last opportunities to prevent the fragmentation of Orthodoxy.

But in the end, there is only so much we can do. To close with a thought that Christos Yannaras has expressed repeatedly in the face of bleakness, solutions to our most difficult problems often come from unexpected places, not as a credit to our diligent efforts, but as a result of the presence and the operation of the Holy Spirit. To this effect, he cites two examples. First, how although in the 60s it seemed certain to everyone that the thousand-year old history of Mount Athos had come to an end, as only a handful of aging monks had remained in these monasteries, generations of younger monks, many of them educated, with a zeal for the contemplative life and with a passion for theology, appeared out of nowhere, manned the dilapidated monasteries and gave a new, unexpected and vibrant life to the monastic peninsula.

The second example is something we see in our days. Without any apparent clear coordination, without the encouragement of a figure such as Nikodemos the Hagiorite who were advocating

[31] A succinct survey of this problem can be found in the late Archimandrite Ephrem Lash's writings. Cf. Ephrem Lash, *The Central Part of the Byzantine Anaphora: a Translator's Notes*, accessed 20 May 2017, http://www.thyateira.org.uk/docs/Articles/FrEphrem_KataPanta.pdf.

frequent communion, in the last few years we can see a rising number of frequent communicants, most of them young, in places such as Greece, where the norm in the previous generation was to receive communion only two or three times a year. There is something acting beyond our intellectual discernment here, something that moves despite our best or our worst efforts. And in the end, it is in the life-giving energies of God that we place our trust. Yet, at the same time I believe that we need to look at the theological, practical, pastoral and ecclesiological challenges we face, and start talking about them in depth, even if our first reaction is that of despair.

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